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Doing good unto all men, especially unto them who
are of the household of faith, recommended:

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S E R M O N

Preached at the

OLD-JEWRY,

March 4th, 1740-1.

TO THE

SOCIETY for RELIEF

OF THE

WIDOWS and ORPHANS

OF

DISSENTING MINISTERS.

By JOSEPH DENHAM.

Published at the Request of the Managers of that Society.

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SEPTIMON

OLD-FATHER

TO THE
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

OF THE
WIDOWS OF FRIENDS



DIRECTOR

BY JOSEPH B. DENHAM

Proprietor of the Rights of the Widows of Friends

LONDON:
Printed for R. B. Smith, at the sign of the Golden Ball, in the Strand, MDCCLXII.
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GALAT. vi. 9, 10.

*And let us not be weary in well-doing :
for in due season we shall reap, if
we faint not.*

*As we have therefore opportunity, let
us do good unto all men, especially
unto them who are of the household of
faith.*

THIS Society being formed with a charitable design, to relieve the *Widows* and *Children* of poor *Dissenting Ministers*, and hitherto encouraged and supported by your chearful liberality, I thought, I could not better serve the purpose of our present meeting, than by a discourse on the exercise of compassion and mercy: it being a disposition the most amiable in itself, greatly beneficial in its consequences, and essential to the character, and hopes of a Christian.

With this view I have chosen the Apostle's exhortation at the close of his letter to the *Galatians*, which is founded on the obligation we are peculiarly under, by the law of Christ, to love one another, and to do all the kind, charitable, and good offices we can, in proportion

to our respective abilities, and opportunities, And lest any should think this direction needless and trifling ; or what was laid out to so good a purpose would be thrown away and lost, he adds, by way of encouragement, that it would turn to a very good account, and an unfainting perseverance herein be abundantly rewarded : *For in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

In treating upon this subject, I would consider these three things.

I. The nature and extent of the duty, expressed in the 9th verse by *well-doing*, and in the 10th, by *doing good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*

II. The reasonableness and excellency of this temper and practice.

III. The order about the manner and time of doing it.

I. Of the nature and extent of the duty. *Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*

Doing good, in the general notion of it, signifies every action, whereby we can be useful and beneficial to others ; and comprehends in it benevolence, and good will to all men ; and a pleasure in every instance of the happiness of others, together with a desire to help all in distress, as we have ability and opportunity for it.

This

This benevolent disposition stands opposed to a narrow contracted state of the mind, that wholly centers in itself, disregards both the happiness, and miseries of every one else, and entirely separates his enjoyments and interests from the rest of mankind.

It is also directly contrary to an envious, malicious, and mischievous temper, which either causes, or delights in the calamities and distresses of others, and makes them the subject of their most cruel jests, and railery.

It is also opposite to a wrathful, boisterous spirit, which treats others with rudeness, insolence, and outrageous passion; is rigid, censorious, and austere, unforgiving, revengeful, and oppressive. This is that spirit and temper which is the reverse of goodness and mercy, is an enemy to the common happiness, odious in itself, and justly esteemed the reproach of our rational nature.

But tho' this is the general notion of goodness, yet I apprehend, the *Apostle*, in the text under our consideration, has a particular reference to that branch of it, which is properly distinguished by the name of mercy, and those fruits which proceed from it.

Now the proper object of mercy is misery: for where there is no misery, no distress, there is no room for the exercise of this disposition.

This eminent branch of the Christian temper, consists in a ready disposition to pity and relieve every distressed object. It includes a compassionate sense and feeling of the evils which

we know have either actually befallen others ; or which we apprehend are coming upon them, accompanied with a desire to help them out of, or to prevent them.

This compassionate and merciful disposition is affected, and acts differently, according to the several cases of distress which come within its knowledge and reach. These may be reduced to two sorts. Either those miseries or dangers which respect the soul ; or those which relate to the outward circumstances, in which others are providentially placed.

The first of these claims our chief notice, and is the noblest charity in the world. What an unnatural barbarity must that be, to omit any thing in our power to save a soul from death ? But this cruelty is greatly aggravated, when we contribute any thing to, or are any ways knowingly instrumental in its ruin. Are souls such trifles, and their everlasting interests such an indifferent matter, that we do not think it worth our while to be concerned what becomes of 'em ?

Permit me here to make one remark ; *viz.* the necessity and usefulness of a gospel ministry, and how much we should be concerned to support it, according to the several stations and circumstances in which we are placed.

The other class of miseries, are those which relate to the outward circumstances, the wants and pressures under which others may labour. This is what, I apprehend, the *Apostle* has more

more immediately in his view. *Let us do good to all men*; let your goodness be exercised in such acts of kindness as are suitable to their case, who are in necessity, and labour under any of the difficulties of life: such as giving bread to the hungry, cloaths to the naked, relief to the needy, refuge to the persecuted, enlargement to the captive, succour to the oppressed, protection to the injured, and your alms to the necessitous. Not to be affected with the sufferings of others, nor desirous to relieve them, is unmercifulness. Not to be merciful is in truth to be unmerciful.

The extent of this duty is *unto all men* without exception. The law of mercy and kindness excludes none the benefit of it; but takes every distressed object under its protection and care, and requires that we distribute, and be assisting to them, in proportion to their necessities, and our own capacity. We are to wish well to the whole human race. Our hearts must be enlarged, and our hands stretched out for all their relief, whose necessities call for it, and so far as we can. No little accidental varieties and differences among us should interrupt it; nor even any ill-treatment we may at any time receive from those whom we relieve, must disturb, or lessen our charitable assistance and succour.

But is it possible that all distressed, and necessitous cases should be relieved and assisted by us? Must we look into the cottages of all the poor,
and

and spread their table with food to feed the hungry there : Must we cloath all the naked ? Must we visit every prison, and release the prisoners, or the captives ? Surely the law cannot thus oblige.

It is very true, the law does not oblige us to an impossibility. This supposition would be inconsistent with the wisdom, goodness, and equity of the lawgiver. It must therefore be understood in such a manner, as is suited to the state and capacity of those, who are to be directed and governed by it.

Here then, we must distinguish between the merciful disposition itself ; and the expressions and exercises of it towards necessitous objects.

As the law respects the temper and disposition of the mind, it must reach to all mankind equally. All who partake of our common nature, must be the subjects of our good wishes ; even they who are wicked, and our declared enemies, must not be excluded. This is our *bles-
sed Lord's* own rule ; *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you : that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven : for he maketh his sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust **. No ill-will to any must ever get the possession of our minds.

But as the law respects the outward expressions and exercise of this tender affection and merciful disposition, it is impossible they should be

** Matth. v. 44, 45.* ex-

extended to all. All objects of distress cannot come within our knowledge ; or if they did, such is our own capacity, that it would be impossible to relieve them all.

Here therefore, is the proper exercise of our prudence, and discretion in the choice of those objects, which we have the greatest reason to think, are most deserving and necessitous, and where our charity and alms is likely to serve the most valuable purposes. This is a very necessary rule of conduct to be observed.

Now of all the objects which stand in competition for our choice, the text directs us, to give the preference to those who are *of the household of faith*, or make the same common profession of Christianity with ourselves : and even among those, I humbly apprehend, they should have our first regards, and principal assistance, whose behaviour is agreeable to the sacred rules of their holy profession, and whose lives are a credit, and an honour to it. All these stand in a special relation to God, and all together make up that society or visible church, of which our *blest Lord* is the glorious, the exalted head. Tho' some may apprehend, and with good reason, that the *Apostle* here principally refers to the provision which ought to be made for the ministers of the gospel, of which he treats in the 6th verse of this chapter, *Let him that is taught in the word, communicate to him that teacheth, in all good things* ; and which is agreeable to what he says to the *Corinthians*, *If we have sown unto you spiritual*

*spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? Do ye not know, that they which minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar, are partakers of the things of the altar *?* Yet, I think, it may also comprehend the body of Christians, as opposed to Heathens and Infidels. If a *Jew*, a *Heathen*, and a *Christian* come in competition for our choice, the text will warrant us to shew favour to the latter, in preference to either of the former, when our own circumstances will not permit us to relieve them all; in regard to the honour of our Lord, and the encouragement of being his disciples, the *Christian* has the better title to our charity. *Whosoever*, says our Lord, *shall give you a cup of water to drink, in my name, or because ye belong to Christ, verily, I say unto you he shall not lose his reward* ||. It being done in his name, and because they belong to him, sanctifies the kindness, and gives a value to it in the sight of God.

II. The reasonableness and excellency of this temper and practice.

1. This may be argued from the consideration of God himself.

It is a conformity to his nature and manner of acting. *Be ye merciful as your Father is merciful* †; and which the Evangelist *Matthew* expresses by being *perfect even as your Father*

* 1 Cor. ix. 11, 13. || Luke vi. 36. † Mat. v. 48.

which

which is in heaven is perfect *. As the goodness of God is displayed in giving to all his creatures every thing that is good, or suited to their respective natures, and tends to their happiness, so his mercy, which is this perfection of goodness, exercised towards those who are in misery, cannot but be tenderly affected with their necessities, and relieves them, so far as it is fit for him to do, as the all-wise Governor of the world.

Man, while he continued innocent, was an object of goodness, but on the entrance of sin into the world, and innumerable evils, the consequence is, he is become an object of mercy; and all the blessings he receives, acts of compassion and charity to him.

In our conformity to this manner of acting, consists an essential part of the moral image of God, our Almighty Maker and Benefactor. And can we conceive of any thing greater or more excellent? If then we *shut up our bowels*, and deny the assistance we are able, and obliged to give the necessitous, we degrade our nature, and bring a reproach upon ourselves.

Further, it is also an expression of our gratitude to God for the various blessings we receive from his mercy. Are we not *cloathed with his wool and his flax*? Is not our daily bread the free gift of his bounty? And are there, think ye, no returns of gratitude to be made? But what returns can we make to him, but, in imitation

* Matth. v. 48.

of this *Father of mercies*, by communicating these blessings to others who stand in need of 'em? The charitable contribution of the *Hebrews* is, by the *Apostle Paul*, stiled a *work and labour of love shewed to God himself* *. He has deputed the poor to receive the testimonies of your thankfulness to him; *he that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord, and that which he hath given will he pay him again* †.

Besides, this disposition and conduct testifies our faithfulness to the trust the blessed God has committed to us. All the blessings, by which we are distinguished from others, are deposited in our hands, by his good providence, for such uses, trusts and purposes, as he, the original *Lord* and proprietor, shall be pleased to direct and appoint. Our right to these is only subordinate, and for the exercise of it are subjected to an account, which he will certainly require us to make up: we must not therefore dispose of these blessings as we please, but according to his order, whose stewards we are. And as some have a larger proportion committed to them, than others, so an answerable degree of usefulness is expected from them. God has indeed mercifully allowed us to make a suitable and comfortable provision both for our necessities and conveniencies: But then, we must not think, that this liberty allows us to center all in ourselves, and engross all to our own use. The *Apostle Paul*, in his solemn charge to *Ti-*

* Heb. vi. 10. † Prov. xix. 17.

moth directs us quite otherwise. *Charge them*, says he, *that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded*; that they do not think too well of themselves, for being rich, and on that account neglect or despise others, in meaner and necessitous circumstances; *that they do not trust in uncertain riches*; as if they had nothing else to do, but hoard up their treasure, not as occasion offers, to relieve those who are in want, but that it may be said they are very rich; or else to squander it away in a profuse extravagant manner upon their lusts, in sensual gratifications or splendid appearances: but, *that they do good*; employ them some way or other for the benefit of others: *That they be rich in good works*; abounding in all acts of kindness, in proportion to the largeness of the trust committed to them: *That they be ready to distribute*; forward, upon all occasions of real and useful charity, to be benefactors: *Willing to communicate* to every good design, as they have opportunity *. And as this is the nature of the trust, and these the orders to be observed, so the great enquiry in the judgment-day will be, whether we have acted agreeable to these orders, and been faithful; for in that day, *He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shewed no mercy* †.

2. The reasonableness and excellency of this spirit and conduct may be argued, from the example of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

* 1 Tim. vi. 17. † James ii. 13.

This he himself proposes for our pattern, and surely we can propose nothing to ourselves more excellent or honourable. *A new commandment, says he, I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another* *. What else was his life, but one continued expression of kindness and charity? *We know, says the Apostle, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that tho' he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich* †. Blessed Jesus! how astonishing is thy compassion and kindness? He who *was in the form of God* took upon him *the form of a servant* ‡. Thus he humbled himself to enrich and bless us. During his stay upon earth, how unweariedly did he seek opportunities to oblige, and be beneficial to all? How many places did he visit to observe those, who stood in need of his help, either for their bodies or their souls? How many sick did he restore to health? How many blind to their sight, lame to their limbs, dumb to their speech, possessed and distracted to their right mind? How tenderly affected towards those in sorrow and afflicted circumstances! Can we see the dear Redeemer dropping his tears over *Jerusalem*, on the prospect of its approaching ruin, and in the midst of his triumphant entry into that city, and not learn compassion? Is it possible to maintain a temper hardened against the miseries of others, with this example before us? With what tender af-

* John xiii. 34. † 2 Cor. viii. 9. ‡ Phil. ii. 6, 7.

fection and compassionate concern did he weep over the grave of *Lazarus*, and mingle his own tears with those of the bereaved family? The more seriously and deliberately we consider this example, the more shall we be convinced of the reasonableness, excellency and propriety of being animated and ruled by a kind and compassionate spirit, towards others in distress. Don't think pity and a sympathizing temper any lessening to your character: *Jesus wept.*

3. The reasonableness and excellency of this spirit and practice, may be argued, from its suitableness to the frame and constitution of our own nature.

Hence it is called humanity. A contrary conduct is offering violence to ourselves. The man must first put off himself, before he can divest himself of bowels of pity and compassion. An unmerciful temper is foreign to our original frame, and therefore justly reckoned monstrous.

There is in the human nature, while it retains its genuine form, and is not perverted by vicious habits, and transports of anger, malice, revenge, and inordinate self-love, a tenderness not easily suppressed, and a compassionate sense of the sufferings of others, which appears even in those who have the least remains of humanity, to let us see, it cannot be quite rooted out.

Now, to what end should this disposition be planted in our nature, by the Almighty *Father of our spirits*, if it was not, on every proper occasion,

caſion, to be exerciſed. A cruel and unmerciful temper thwarts the very deſign of our Creator, in making us men, and of Chriſtianity, in making us Chriſtians, and is what all condemn and abhor.

4. There is alſo an equitableneſs in the merciful diſpoſition, ariſing from our own liableneſs to miſery and diſtreſs; and the treatment we ſhould expect from others under ſuch circumſtances. Suppoſe we were to put ourſelves in the room of a perſon labouring under the wants and preſſures of life, abridged in the allowance of daily bread, almoſt worn down with painful diſorders, groaning under a variety of loſſes, and very difficult occurrences, ſurrounded with the cries of a naked and hungry family, and deprived of thoſe friends who were wont to be made uſe of by providence, as the inſtruments of ſuccour and relief: under ſuch a wretched and afflicted ſtate of things, what ſhould we expect from the compaſſion and mercy of others? Would it not be, that they ſhould ſympathize with us in our troubles and wants, and do all in their power to relieve us? Would not this expectation be juſt and reaſonable? Would it not be fit our neighbour, who is able to help us, ſhould look into our cottage, commiſerate our diſtreſs, and ſend ſomething to feed the hungry, to cloath the naked, and if he could do no more, ſend at leaſt the crumbs, the fragments that come from his table? If there is an equity, a propriety in this, there is the ſame equity

quity and reason why we should relieve those who are in want, when the providence of God has enabled us to do it. *Our mountain is not so strong, that it cannot be moved.* Are we certain, that the wise providence of God may not see fit to reduce us from a state of affluence and fullness to want? Sure I am, that unmercifulness itself would abundantly justify this change of circumstances, and thereby, in an awful manner, teach us both the amiableness, importance, and necessity of shewing mercy.

5. The reasonableness and excellency of this spirit and practice further appears, from the consideration of the objects of our compassion and mercy.

They are all partakers of the same nature with ourselves, and consequently have an undoubted claim to all the benefits of humanity, tenderness and friendship. *The rich and poor meet together, the Lord is the maker of them all* *.

The distinctions among men in their worldly circumstances depend upon the disposals of providence; it is the blessing of God makes the difference; *he gives power to get wealth* †. Nor do these differences give any real intrinsic worth; nor upon that account are persons either better or worse, in the estimation of the blessed God, *who regardeth not the rich more than the poor* ‡. These distinctions lay the persons, in whose favour they are made, under stronger obligations

* Prov. xxii. 2. † Eccles. v. 19. ‡ Job xxxiv. 19.

to supply the necessitous who come within their knowledge, in proportion to the degree of those distinctions: and instead of treating them with disdain, insult and neglect, as is too common a practice, such should esteem it their honour, as well as their duty, to be the seasonable instruments of help and assistance.

But that which should have the greatest weight with us is, are they not our *fellow Christians*? Do they not stand in the same relation to the one *Lord* and *Lawgiver* of his Church? Are they not all members of the same body, and fellow-heirs of the same inheritance? They and we have but *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one body, and one spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling* *. This consideration should endear all, for *whom Christ died*, one to another; and as the *Apostle John* strongly expresses it, *even to lay down our lives for the brethren* †, if there should be any real necessity for it, and the interest of Christianity requires it.

6. *Lastly*, The reasonableness and excellency of this spirit and practice is evident from the authority of Christ, who has expressly commanded it, and hath promised abundantly to reward it.

There are innumerable precepts to this purpose. It is represented as *fulfilling the law of Christ* ‡. *Be ye merciful even as your Father in heaven is merciful* ||. *Be kind one to another* §.

* Eph. iv. 5.

† 1 John iii. 16.

‡ Galat. vi. 2.

|| Luke vi. 36.

§ 1 Pet. iii. 8.

*Be of one mind, having compassion one of another, Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous †. Be tender hearted ‡. Love you enemies, do good to them who hate and persecute you ||. To love mercy is reckoned among the weightier matters of the law §, and therefore must have a very important place in our holy religion. Who so hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother hath need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him †. He has no love to God, nor is he beloved by him. He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen ** ? What command can be more clear or expresse ? But the more effectually to engage us to act agreeable to this apostolical direction, the same Lord who has commanded it, has also promised abundantly to reward it. Our duty and our interest is herein connected ; and the more regular and uniform our obedience is, the more shall we consult both our present and future happiness: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. What we thus distribute is not like water spilt upon the ground, that cannot be gathered up again ; but as good seed sown, from which we may expect to reap plentifully at the harvest.*

I shall not stay here to enlarge on the several promises made to the charitable person, which relate to the present life : such as the best fe-

† 1 Peter iii. 8. ‡ Eph. iv. 32. || Luke vi. 35. § Mat. xxiii. 23. † 1 John iii. 17. ** 1 John iv. 20.

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curity from accidents ; *he that deviseth liberal things, by liberal things shall stand* * : the truest honour ; *he has dispersed abroad, he hath given to the poor, his righteousness endureth for ever, his horn shall be exalted with honour* || : prosperity in our affairs ; *the liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth, shall be watered also himself* † : the providence of God seldom fails in this world amply to repay what is thus laid out, *in ministering to the necessities of the poor* : and also an entail of blessings on his posterity ; *the generation of the upright shall be blessed* ‡.

Tho' we are warranted to have a regard to these things, yet the text principally directs our thoughts to much more considerable expectations. This world will last but a very little time, but we have souls that will live for ever : and it will admit of no dispute, whether their everlasting interests are not the most important and momentous to us.

Not that I would have you imagine there is any meritorious connection between works of charity, and the rewards of eternal life ; or that these alone, and unaccompanied with the other fruits of the spirit, will be sufficient, or make any amends for the want of 'em : because eternal happiness is not promised as the reward of any one single action, no not of the best, but of all good actions united, thro' the mercy and grace of the gospel.

* Isa. xxxii. 8. || Psal. cxii. 9. † Prov. xi. 25.
‡ Psal. cxii. 2.

This distribution to the necessities of others is, in the language of scripture, *making to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness*, (not of riches unjustly gotten, for we can make to ourselves no friends of these, but of false and deceitful riches) *that when ye fail, ye may be received into everlasting habitations* *. If we have been faithful in this mammon, he will commit to us the true riches, or those riches which we may properly call our own, and will never disappoint us, which neither the moth nor the rust can corrupt, nor thieves steal away from us : but if we have not been faithful in that which is another man's, or in dispensing those things which are intrusted to us, as stewards, in acts of righteousness, piety, mercy and charity, *who shall give us that which is our own* † ? or those great and more lasting treasures which we shall certainly possess and enjoy for ever, as our own, without any fear of losing, or being deprived of. By bestowing a decent proportion of fading transitory riches, we lay up certain riches for ourselves in a better world. With this consideration, the *Apostle Paul* closes his charge to *Timothy*, *laying up in store for themselves a good foundation* ||, or a good treasure against the time to come, by securing a title to eternal happiness. Our Saviour, *the true and faithful witness*, tells us, that tho' they to whom we do good, and shew kindness, *cannot recompense us, yet we shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just* ‡. By

* Luke xvi. 9. † Ver. 11, 12. ‡ Tim. vi. 18.

† Luke xiv. 14.

*giving alms to the poor, we provide to ourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens, where no thief approacheth, nor moth corrupteth *.*

The Apostle directs that we give all diligence to add to faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and then he adds at the 10th verse, *that doing these things, we may never fall; but an entrance may be ministered to us abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ †.* From all this it appears, that the best provision which they, who are in circumstances of giving, can make for themselves against the time of their death, in order to their reception into the other world, is the charitable actions they do, while on earth.

Thus I have endeavoured to support the obligations we are under, to shew compassion to those who are in want, and the excellency of this spirit.

III. The time and manner of doing it. *As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, and let us not be weary.*

It must be as we have opportunity. This may refer,

I. To the season, or time of doing it. It is not to be adjourned to an uncertain hereafter. Every design of usefulness and doing good should be carried into execution as soon as may be,

* Luke xii. 33. † 2 Pet. i. 5.

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lest any thing should arise which may divert us from it, and all our good resolutions prove abortive. Whoever will deliberately reflect upon their inconstancy, and in how many instances an alteration, from their first designs, happens, will soon be convinced of the necessity of this rule of conduct. If therefore, our present resolutions are good, as is the case under our present consideration, why should we delay? Why should we promise ourselves a better opportunity, when we can't but know, that the most necessary, and important resolutions are often prevented, by a variety of the most inconsiderable and trivial accidents? *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it *?* And herein its deceitfulness eminently consists, that tho' it does not deceive us, in representing what are our present purposes, and designs, these we may, and do certainly know; yet we are often deceived in the account it gives us, what will be our future behaviour, or the frame, and disposition we shall be in some time hence. In truth, this is all the deceitfulness our hearts are capable of, with respect to ourselves; and herein they very often impose upon us. If we make a wrong choice at first, it is fit and necessary, as soon as we find our mistake, that we alter our purposes: but tho' this should be done, yet it too frequently happens, that where our designs are good and useful, we quite drop them, and take contrary

* Jer. xvii. 9.

measures. When therefore we have formed any useful designs, let the first proper season that offers itself be embraced, lest we grow remiss, become indifferent, and it may be at last averse to it.

But suppose there should be no alteration in our present purposes, are we certain of the continuance of our lives? What more uncertain than life? The scripture compares it to a vapour, *that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away* *; to a tale that is told, and then remembered no more †; to wind that passeth away, and cometh not again ||: As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth: for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more ‡. As life is the free gift of God, so the continuance of it is by his mere good pleasure; and therefore, whensoever he pleases it may, without any injustice, be taken away. This he may do, without any consideration of sin at all, much more when we have presumptuously sinned against him, and broke through all the obligations of his law, and endearments of his mercy. We are then only sure of the present time, and consequently, whatever good we do should be done as soon as possibly we can. *Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.* This may be considered as a reproof to those, who do no good till their death. Such live uselessly and

* James iv. 14. † Psal. xc. 9. || Psal. lxxviii. 39.
‡ Psal. ciii. 15, 16.

uncharitably to the world, and then when they come to die, think to atone for their neglects, by shewing some extraordinary bounty to the poor. This sort of proceeding is very much like the case of the person, who adjourns his repentance to a death-bed, vainly imagining this to be the most proper season, to dispatch the most important work of all, even then, when he is scarce fit for any thing, and can scarce bear the pains of his sickness, and the agonies of dissolving nature with any tolerable decency. This reason our Lord gives for his own conduct; *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work* *. so long as he continued on earth, he took all opportunities of benefiting mankind; because the time would very soon come, when he should be taken away from them.

Further, let it be considered, if we neglect the present opportunity, it may please God to deny us the honour of performing our resolutions. It would be righteous in him to make such a change in our circumstances, as may incapacitate us for giving. If therefore we would lay up in store for ourselves, we should do it while we are able. The uncertain state of our affairs, instead of being made use of as an argument to delay our shewing mercy, as is too frequently the case, should hasten us in doing all the good in our power. And indeed this is the only sure method of putting ourselves, and all

* John ix. 4.

our interests into the safest hand; and of making the most certain provision for futurity, and of preventing the fears of poverty from coming to pass. *Trust in the Lord*, says the Psalmist, *and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed* *. It is a very sorry excuse, that we cannot be prevailed upon to contribute to the relief of others necessities; least we should come to want ourselves. This excuse, if admitted, will always prevent our doing good in any the most flourishing circumstances; because there will always be the same uncertainty in our condition, and instability in all human affairs: and since this reason will always remain, it is not to be supposed, with any probability, that the same disposition should not continue; and consequently, the doing good will always be prevented.

As we have opportunity, may also signify, that we should embrace every season that offers itself, to exercise mercy, and shew kindness. Where the principle of compassion, and the law of kindness governs in the heart, it will appear in such chearful readiness. This is what the *Apostle* mentions to the honour of the churches of *Macedonia*, that tho' they were in very low circumstances themselves, yet they gave as liberally, as if they had been rich: they *abounded unto the riches of their liberality*; and the reason of it was, *because they were willing of themselves, and had first given themselves to the Lord* †. There

* Psal. xxxvii. 3. † 2 Cor. viii. 2, 3, 4, 5.

needed no more arguments, after this, to engage their chearful contribution, now a proper opportunity offered itself. And, in the *ninth chapter*, he also mentions it to the honour of the *Corinthians*, that he knew the forwardness of their minds, for which he boasted of 'em, to those of *Macedonia*. While we have the poor always with us, we shall never want objects of distress. Opportunities of shewing kindness will frequently return, and should be improved, according to our ability : and were we more impressed with a sense of our obligation, and how much herein we resemble the *Father of mercies*, our contributions would be chearful and liberal, our supplies for the poor and needy, flow as water from a fountain, and never be considered as an assessment or tax upon our estates.

Tho' every opportunity of doing good should be chearfully embraced, yet there are some particular seasons, when the necessities of others are most pressing, and the objects which present themselves peculiarly deserving.

The case may be so circumstanced, as in a particular manner requires our immediate assistance, and more than common relief. Of this nature are times of sickness, the decay of trade, and scarcity of work, dearness of provision, the placing out young persons to such trades, as they are capable of, or at their first entrance upon the business of life, when an exhibition of this kind may be of singular service, and the greatest use to encourage diligence, and to lay

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a foundation for future improvements, and usefulness. The poor *widows*, and *fatherless* claim a considerable share of our charity. Their case is often so circumstanced, and the difficulties they labour under so many and great, that to neglect them is the greatest unmercifulness and cruelty. To them the most tender pity is due.

2. *To do good as we have opportunity*, may also refer to our own ability, and the proportion we are to observe in our charity.

There is an equity in it, that our liberality should be in proportion to what we can spare, from the other expences of life which are necessary and proper for that station, in which the providence of God has wisely placed us. An exact estimate, perhaps, is not to be made. The circumstances of men are very different : this therefore must be left to every one's own conscience, as the proper test of the merciful disposition and inclination of the heart. This seems to be left at large, that it may the more evidently appear to be a free-will offering, proceeding from a prevailing and ruling affection, both to God and men. However fond some may be of making an exact calculation on this article, and of the greatest caution lest they should exceed in it, I do not think there is any great danger of running into excess here. It would fare much better with the world, if the same scrupulous exactness discovered itself, in the various articles of really unnecessary expences ;

in these there is a much greater danger of excess. There is a decency of character to be maintained, not only with respect to the present time, but also for futurity ; but tho' this is to be admitted, and allowed for in the proportion of our charity ; yet, in stating this account, we should be careful not to call that by the name of decency, which is a mere superfluity, and an unnecessary expence. Many things may be very decently spared in the articles of building, furniture, apparel, equipage, and luxurious entertainments : as also, in the article of frequenting the expensive scenes of vanity and folly, big with innumerable evils, which have ended in the ruin of multitudes, especially of the rising generation. In this part we can't be too scrupulous and exact, nor set a too careful guard over it : and the consequence of it would be, that we should be able, in a larger proportion, to relieve the necessitous, without the least detriment, so much feared, to ourselves. These savings from needless expences, would be a fund of charity to have recourse to, whenever a proper opportunity offers itself.

Our alms must be also out of our own property. We are not to cheat and defraud others under a pretence of giving to charitable uses. What we have wrongfully got is none of ours, but his whom we have wronged ; and to him, if living, if dead, to his representatives we are obliged in conscience to restore it. To give, what belongs to another man, is not charity, but

robbery and theft. We are equally obliged to be just as well as merciful : and therefore, they who have it not of their own, must not give away that to the poor, which of right belongs to their creditors. In adjusting therefore the proportion of what we should give, this rule must be observed in making our estimate.

Let it also be observed, with respect to those who have it not in their power to give any assistance by their money, that there are other ways which the law of mercy directs them to take. There is no condition so mean, but an opportunity offers to promote, and forward a charitable and useful design, some way or other, even in their sphere ; and wherein they may become instruments of *doing good*. Such may, by their seasonable discourses, pious examples, and prudent endeavours, contribute to make men better, instructing the ignorant, establishing the weak, reproofing the irregular, reclaiming from the paths of wickedness and sin, promoting peace, and thereby contributing to make the lives of others more comfortable. These may also make use of that little acquaintance, friendship, or interest they have in others, who are better able, to stir them up to contribute to the useful design. This may be of good service ; and the person, who exercises himself this way, becomes a benefactor, proportionably to his abilities and interests, not only to those whose cause he is an advocate for ; but also to the persons themselves he intercedes with, and puts upon

upon giving. Above all, such may and should make use of all the interest they have in God, by their prayers, that he would be graciously pleased, in the course of his providence, to favour the design, and raise it up friends to contribute to its support and encouragement. Thus all are obliged, in proportion to the talents and abilities they are entrusted with, *to do good unto all men*, do all they can to serve those who want their assistance.

3. And lastly, the *Apostle* adds, *we must not be weary in well-doing*: but, as the occasion returns, be regular, uniform, and unwearied in it. As long as objects of necessity present themselves to be relieved and provided for, and our abilities to give are continued, we are not to be discharged from this branch of our duty. The law of mercy and kindness is obligatory upon us, while there are objects of mercy to show it to. And did we add prudence and frugality to our diligence and industry in our respective callings; did we manage our affairs with discretion, and lay by in store a part of what God has prospered us with, we should always have a *poor's stock*, or treasury, for these purposes; and at the same time give with more liberality and cheerfulness. *To good, and communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices, God is well pleased* *. The reward of well-doing is promised, upon supposal of our perseverance to the end. *For in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not*. If we

* Heb. xiii. 16.

have

have any hopes of this glorious harvest, we must *not faint*, before the time of reaping comes. The seed-time is but short, but we shall reap the fruits of it for ever.

A covetous spirit shows itself, not only in an eager and unsatiable desire, and an anxious tormenting care to obtain as much of this world as may be, and in prosecution of this scheme, in going into any methods of conduct, and doing any unjust action : but also in keeping an estate when obtained. Such are truly of this spirit, who cannot find in their hearts to spare any thing, to relieve those who are in want : or who, if at any time, through the importunity of friends, are prevailed upon to contribute any thing, on a particular occasion, withdraw their assistance, and refuse further help, from an eager desire, only to enlarge their estate. There are too many of this temper, who are not only sordid towards themselves, but useless to all about them : eager after the world, with no design of enjoying, or being the better for it themselves, or distributing any part of it to relieve the wants of others : *as if a man's life consisteth in the abundance of the things which he possesseth* *. A heart thus deeply engaged in the world will stand it out against all the commands, and invitations of the gospel ; and seems to be more afraid of poverty and loss, than of the wrath of God himself. This disposition effectually obstructs all those passages, through which the con-

* Luke xii. 15.

sideration of mercy should enter into the mind. The man who denies his assistance to the miserable cases which present themselves, says to his gold, *thou art my hope, and to the fine gold thou art my confidence* : he rejoices, not in doing good, but because his wealth is great, and because his band hath gotten much *, and which he resolves to hoard up with no other intention, but merely to increase his store, and to lay up goods for many years : not considering, that if any man love the world, and the things of it, to this degree, the love of the Father is not in him †. Unless we guard against this insatiable desire after the things of this world, it will effectually prevent our engaging in any useful charitable design ; or, if at first engaged, our continuance in it.

There are two qualifications of our Christian obedience peculiarly recommended in the word of God. The one is *steadiness*, and the other *abounding in it*. We must be steady in it, in opposition to that which is merely occasional. It must be our customary practice, our stated course, what we are determined in, and invariably pursue. Herein we must *exercise ourselves*. It signifies nothing that we begin well, unless also we finish well. Now, doing good to men, being an essential part of our Christian obedience, must be made our daily care and employment. And further, instead of looking after pretences to go back, from any good beginnings

* Job xxi. 25, 26. † 1 John ii. 15.

or resolutions of usefulness, we should press forwards, and with a becoming zeal *abound* therein, proceed in acts of charity and benevolence with an increasing pleasure, and more enlargements of heart. *The liberal, instead of being weary in well-doing, deviseth liberal things. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies and kindness* *, and wear these about with you at all times, that you may be ready to every good work; and not suffer your goodness to be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that soon passeth away.

Having considered these particulars, I now proceed to an application of the subject.

APPLICATION.

Let love and good will to men be our governing principle. Unless this disposition accompanies our almsgiving, it will not be acceptable. This is the sentiment of an inspired *Apostle*: *Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing* †. Almsgiving and charity are here expressly distinguished: and therefore charity must signify some virtue, or good habit of a more general and extensive nature: and which the *Apostle* defines, *verses, 4, 5, 6, 7. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not*

* Coloss. iii. 12. † 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; begeth all things, endureth all things. This is that charity which is the end of the commandment; all the law, relating to our neighbour, is fulfilled in one word, even in this; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself *. We are never to consider others as such in whom we have no concern; but as in a moral sense ourselves. Tho' we stand in nearer relations, and are under more special obligations to some than others: yet we are so nearly related, and allied to all, that they have an undoubted claim to our love and goodwill; but good men justly claim a most distinguishing share in our affections: these, says the Psalmist †, are the excellent of the earth, in whom is all my delight. This is one of the essential branches of Christianity, one half of practical religion, as love to God is the other. The blessed God highly approves such an imitation of his own diffusive goodness, and takes a peculiar complacency in every good man, acting under the influence of this principle, as a living image of himself. This is that temper, that divine disposition which abides in the heavenly world, when the exercise of faith and hope shall cease. Charity never faileth; it continues for ever, and will be a noble part of our employment there; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away ‡: By this knowledge, I ap-

* Gal. v. 14. † Psal. xvi. 2. ‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 8.

prehend, the *Apostle* must mean some extraordinary gift, and which he refers to in the 2d verse; *though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge. To one,* says the same *Apostle, is given the word of knowledge by the spirit †: and therefore, the greatest of these is charity, verse 13.* This temper suits the state of future blessedness, and is an eminent and necessary qualification of every subject of it; without which he would not be fit either for the business or blessedness, the employments or enjoyments of it. And shall not the prospect of this blessed world, where we hope to spend our eternity, engage us to cultivate that frame, that godlike disposition, which so eminently qualifies for, and without which we shall certainly be excluded from it.

Of this disposition, liberality towards our poor brethren is a necessary, and indeed one of the most amiable branches. From hence it comes to pass, that in common language, it has been confined to the particular sense of *charity to the poor*: tho' this is only one single instance, and fruit of it. Where this divine principle governs, *we shall weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice ‡: we shall remember those that are in bonds, under any of the difficulties and pressures of life, as bound with them: and them that suffer adversity, as being ourselves also in the body ¶.* The melancholly objects of misery which we see surrounding us, would deeply affect our hearts, move the bowels of

† 1 Cor. xii. 8. ‡ Rom. xii. 15. ¶ Heb. xiii. 3.

our compassion, and command our assistance: It would not suffer us to put off our starving fellow-creatures with an empty compliment, a few good wishes, or compassionate expressions, when it is in our power to minister to their necessities. No! 'tis a communicative and diffusive principle: it will enlarge our hearts to the indigent, open our hands in benefactions, and make us *rich in good works*. The lovely character which *Job* gives of himself in the vindication of his own integrity, would be ours: *I delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy* *. This disposition would crush every little selfish design, all narrowness and penuriousness of spirit; direct us to every duty we owe our neighbour; will instruct us how we are to treat him on every occasion; and not only restrain us from that conduct which may be prejudicial to, but put us upon doing all the good we can for him. Oh! study the excellency of this spirit, and be daily cultivating it. Would to God it was more prevailing! what an honour would it bring to our holy profession? With how much glory would it fill the Christian church? What blessings should we be to all about us? With how much peace and satisfaction would it fill our minds? What benefactors to mankind?

It now remains, that you apply these things to the particular service of this day. In this

* *Job* xxix. 12, 13, 14, &c.

part of the subject I am persuaded you are before-hand with me, and that it will be no difficulty to prevail with you to carry this principle of *good will to men* into exercise, as a proper opportunity now offers, to shew your compassion and mercy.

It is one part, and a very excellent one it is, of the Christian spirit, *easy to be intreated* *, in opposition to that temper, which cannot be prevailed upon to attend to the arguments, and considerations which reason and our holy religion offer. There is indeed an easiness to be persuaded, that argues weakness and stupidity; and is the reverse of that firmness of mind which should appear, in a regular course of piety; but this has nothing to do in the present case: the service to which you are now intreated, being to persuade you to it, not to divert you from it. If any design of good is proposed, any scheme on foot of extensive usefulness, the Christian temper is easily persuaded to go into it: it is not dragged into it by the mere force of importunity, and the warm application of others; but with all forwardness, and a willing mind, gives assistance, and with pleasure, and thankfulness to providence for the opportunity, takes his share in the common service: it despises all the little excuses of narrow minds, and abounds in liberality, proportionably to the usefulness and exigence of the case.

I doubt not, with a sacred pleasure you reflect on the cheerful, and liberal assistance you

* James iii. 17.

have already given to this charitable design, upon a thorough conviction of its being a very useful one: and it must give you a proportionable uneasiness; should any obstruction be given to the progress of it.

For my own part, I heartily bless God that so compassionate a scheme has been devised, and so greatly encouraged; and take this opportunity to return public thanks to those worthy persons, who have favoured it; and been entrusted with the wise, faithful and impartial management of it. May the blessing of God accompany all their endeavours and prudent care to support and enlarge it!

That beneficent, and charitable spirit which has so eminently appeared, on various occasions, I cannot but look upon as one of the greatest glories of this city: and may it not be mentioned to the honour of the *Protestant Dissenters*, that, in proportion to their number and abilities, they have *abounded unto the riches of their liberality*? and I cannot also but think, that the prayers and thanksgivings of the many objects of distress, who have been relieved, have exceedingly contributed to derive a blessing upon it.

I hope none will censure this design as formed in opposition to one of the like nature, among our *Brethren of the Church of England*. No! on the contrary, we rejoice in every useful design carried on among them; and hope we may be permitted to walk a-breadth with them, in the ways of charity and mercy.

Methinks the very name of Widows and
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ORPHANS, who have nothing of their own to support 'em, should strike upon every tender passion: none but the cruel and unmerciful would say, ah! so would we have it: and give me leave to hope, that their being the WIDOWS and ORPHANS of *Dissenting Ministers* will not lessen your concern for them.

Permit me to say, this is an offering very proper to accompany the national prayers we have lately been putting up to Almighty God for his gracious appearance for us, in the war we are so necessarily engaged in; to maintain our undoubted rights most injuriously invaded, and to protect our national properties from being plundered, with many circumstances of barbarity and cruelty, and in violation of the most solemn treaties. *Is not this the fast,* says God by the Prophet, *that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh *?*

To conclude, *If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies †, do ye shew the greatest diligence, in the practice of charity, to the full assurance of hope unto the end ‡: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

* Is. lviii. 6, 7. † Phil. ii. 1. ‡ Heb. vi. 12.

